

Comparing similar auxiliary words

Ref Hsk5 Grammar

总算 vs 终于 — “finally, at last”

Both mean “finally,” but the feeling differs. **总算** is **informal** and breathes **relief** — things finally worked out *acceptably*, often after worry or impatience. **终于** is more **neutral and objective**, for any long-awaited result (good *or* bad). 总算 rarely goes before the subject.

{zh: 等 |děng|waited / 了 |le / 很久 |hěn jiǔ|a long time / , 他 |tā|he / 总算 |zǒng suàn|at last (relief) / 来 |lái|came / 了 |le / 。 }

After waiting ages, he's finally here.

{zh: 经过 |jīng guò|after / 多年 |duō nián|years of / 努力 |nǔ lì|effort / , 我们 |wǒ men|we / 终于 |zhōng yú|finally / 成功 |chéng gōng|succeeded / 了 |le / 。 }

After years of effort, we finally succeeded.

Remember: 总算 = “finally, *phew*” (informal relief); 终于 = neutral “at last.” A *bad* ending takes 终于, never 总算: 终于失败了 (“failed in the end”) ✓, but 总算失败了 × — there's no relief in failing.

Watch out

- Reach for 总算 only when the outcome is a *welcome* one you'd worried about.